

How Should You Recruit and Hire Volunteers?

First, consider: how has your organization recruited volunteers in the past? Have any problems occurred because there is no official procedure to recruit volunteers?

Now that you have designed volunteer schedules and job descriptions plan, the next step is to look for suitable volunteers. You should have an internal system for interviewing and hiring each volunteer. Your approach should be systematic: the steps you take should be a procedure that is the same for each person. Making everyone follow similar steps for recruitment and having everyone begin and start at the same time creates an ethic of fairness in the organization and avoids the impression of favoritism.

You can recruit volunteers using the following steps:

1. **Advertise** – You can promote your volunteer program in social situations, distribute flyers, send out emails, post an ad on your website and other recruitment websites, and hold volunteer recruitment meetings.

Very Important: Never just bring someone into your organization without thinking it through. We have learned this lesson the hard way: it ALWAYS matters who your volunteers are. An organization is a living organism made out of people, and every single person in your organization is important. In a few months, when you are stressed out over managing a difficult person, you might regret that you were not more careful in the beginning, when you brought them in to your organization.

2. **Create an Application**

Form – We recommend creating a simple application form for

volunteers to fill out which includes the basic information you need in order to follow up with people: name, address, phone number(s), email address, areas of interest, skills to offer, hours of availability, some relevant work or volunteer experience, and emergency contacts. This will make it easier for you to assess who is the right person for each job and to find a replacement if a volunteer does not show up when she is supposed to or if there is an emergency.

Keep neutral in an interview. Do not let your personal feelings get in the way of your best judgment. If you are not sure about a potential volunteer, ask your colleagues' opinions!

- 3. Interview** – Interview volunteers the way you do with staff. This process should be the same for everyone (even if the applicant is your best friend). Yes, you need formal interviews for your volunteers. The best way to avoid issues down the road is to spend the time, before making decisions, to see if an individual is a suitable candidate for your organization. A short interview, one-on-one, gives you an opportunity to talk to the potential volunteer about her interests and experience and assess whether or not she is the right fit for your organization. You should also take the opportunity to really listen to the person and hear what her concerns and interests are. Listen to see if she sounds reliable and sensible. Does the person really understand and care about the mission of your organization? What is it that she needs or wants from the experience? Can she explain how she would implement a difficult task? Does she have a good understanding of what your organization does and how she can help? Give her a chance to ask questions too. If you are not sure about whether or not to bring someone into the organization, ask one of your colleagues to interview her too. Also, some organizations that work on political issues may need to be careful about troublemakers who come in with the intention of disrupting the work or inciting internal conflict. This is an old tactic used in many

countries and is yet another reason to start off new volunteers with very minimal levels of responsibility, so that you can learn about new people and build trust gradually over time.

4. **References** – If the volunteer job involves any special responsibilities or experience, especially handling money or working with vulnerable people, ask for references, and call the references to ask about the person. The references can be a former boss, colleague, or someone else who can speak to the candidate’s relevant experience. Listen for what the referee does not say, as well as what she or he does say. If your program provides services or help to children, find out what the legal requirements are for volunteers who have contact with children in your town or state. In many countries, staff and volunteers who work with children may need to go through background checks and register with the authorities.

5. **Decision** – Once you have made a decision, inform the applicant quickly. If you find someone good, get them involved early and often. The longer you take to involve them, the greater the chance that they will change their minds about volunteering. Even if you do not have a volunteer orientation right away, you might have some events coming up in which volunteers could participate.